

RETAIL PRICES - MARCH QUARTER, 1954.

The "C" Series Index Numbers.

Index numbers of retail prices ("C" Series) for the March quarter of 1954 (with the weighted average of the six capital cities in 1923-1927 as base of 1,000) were as shown below.

"C" Series Retail Price Index Numbers and Percentage Increases, March Quarter, 1954.

City.	Index Number.	Increase from Year Ended June, 1939.	Increase from March Quarter, 1953.	Increase from December Quarter, 1953.
		%	%	%
Brisbane ..	2,187	153.4	3.9	0.5
Toowoomba ..	2,204	159.0	3.7	0.5
Rockhampton ..	2,221	158.0	3.8	0.9
Townsville ..	2,304	152.6	4.0	1.2
Bundaberg ..	2,158	156.6	2.6	1.0
Warwick ..	2,180	165.2	3.1	0.6

The "C" Series retail prices index number for Queensland (weighted average of "five towns") increased from 2,184 in the December quarter, 1953, to 2,197 in the March quarter of 1954. The rise was equivalent to 0.6 per cent., compared with 1.4 per cent. in the preceding quarter, and was the lowest rise in the first quarter of any year since 1949. The increase was smallest in Brisbane and Toowoomba where it was 0.5 per cent., the other four cities for which data are available showing larger rises ranging up to 1.2 per cent. in Townsville.

In Brisbane, house rent with a rise of 1.1 per cent. during the quarter was the section of the index showing the greatest relative rise, but, owing to its greater weight in the total, a rise of 0.6 per cent. in the food and groceries group was a more important factor in the total increase. Clothing and footwear and miscellaneous items showed smaller rises of 0.2 per cent. and 0.4 per cent. respectively.

As in Brisbane, in the other cities food and groceries were the most important cause of the quarter's rise in the index numbers, and larger increases in this group of items in all five provincial cities caused their larger rises for the whole "C" Series index. In Townsville, this effect was supplemented by a relatively large increase of 1.1 per cent. in miscellaneous items, the highest in this group for any other city being 0.5 per cent. in Bundaberg.

The total increase in the "C" Series index number for Brisbane over the period of twelve months ended March, 1954, was 3.9 per cent., compared with 4.9 per cent. for the preceding twelve months and 24.4 per cent. for the twelve months up to March, 1952. The small increases in recent quarters appear to be consistent with a continuation of the trend towards more stable prices which first became noticeable at the beginning of 1952.

Percentage changes during the last quarter and since 1938-39 in food and groceries, clothing and footwear, and miscellaneous items are shown in the following table.

Retail Prices, Percentage Increases, March Quarter, 1954.

City.	Food and Groceries.		Clothing and Footwear.		Miscellaneous Items.	
	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1953.	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1953.	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1953.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Brisbane ..	192.5	0.6	276.0	0.2	109.0	0.4
Toowoomba	209.1	0.8	277.2	0.4	107.3	0.1
Rockhampton	189.5	1.7	265.9	0.1	117.7	0.2
Townsville	183.0	1.6	273.1	0.2	118.6	1.1
Bundaberg	183.2	1.4	268.8	0.1	104.7	0.5
Warwick ..	201.3	1.0	275.2	0.2	113.7	0.3

Food and Groceries.

The increases recorded in the food and grocery index numbers for March quarter were chiefly due to increases in the prices of bread, onions, flour, eggs, and bacon. The increases were offset to a large extent by a decrease in the price of potatoes from a high average during the December quarter, 1953. In Rockhampton the price of eggs rose more than in Brisbane while potato prices did not fall as much as in Brisbane. In Townsville the price of bread rose more than in the other cities.

Clothing and Miscellaneous.

Prices in these sections showed very little change compared with December quarter, 1953. The biggest movement was a rise of 1.1 per cent. in Townsville miscellaneous items, chiefly due to a rise in firewood prices.

Rent (4 and 5 Roomed Houses).

The rent index remained stationary in Toowoomba and Warwick, but increased in the other four cities for which data are collected by amounts ranging from 0.5 per cent. in Rockhampton to 3.1 per cent. in Bundaberg.

Comparison of Costs in Queensland Cities.

The following table shows the amounts, for the various Queensland cities, required in March quarter, 1954, to purchase the quantity of goods or housing which would have cost £1 in Brisbane.

Amounts Required in Various Cities to Purchase Equivalent of £1 in Brisbane.

City.	All Groups.			Food and Groceries.			Rent (4 and 5 Rooms).			Clothing and Footwear.			Miscellaneous Items.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Brisbane ..	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Toowoomba ..	1	0	1 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	1	0	0 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	6
Rockhampton	1	0	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	8 $\frac{1}{4}$	18	10	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	19	10		1	1	2
Townsville ..	1	1	0 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	1	7	1	0	7 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	1	11
Bundaberg ..		19	8 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	5	15	8		19	10	7	1	0	5
Warwick ..		19	11 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	4 $\frac{1}{4}$	16	0	4	19	10	4	1	1	6 $\frac{1}{2}$

In relation to Brisbane, the prices of all groups together changed very little in the provincial cities for which the index numbers are calculated. The largest variation in these relative prices occurred in Townsville, where the amount required to purchase goods costing £1 in Brisbane rose from £1 0s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. during December quarter to £1 1s. 0 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. during March quarter.

The prices of food and groceries in each of the five provincial cities for which data are collected are higher than in Brisbane, and during the recent quarter their excess over Brisbane prices, which had lessened in the two previous quarters in all cities, again increased. Townsville prices were dearest and food and groceries which would have cost £1 in Brisbane cost £1 1s. 7d. in that city, followed by Rockhampton where £1 0s. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. would have been needed to buy the same amount of goods.

Clothing and footwear were very close to metropolitan prices in all five provincial cities. To buy goods worth £1 in Brisbane, 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. extra would have been required in Townsville, while 2d. would have been saved in Rockhampton.

Miscellaneous items were substantially more expensive in all five provincial cities than in Brisbane. Bundaberg and Toowoomba prices were closest to Brisbane, the additional costs in these cities being 5d. and 6d. respectively in the £. In the other three cities, the margin over Brisbane prices has become greater during the last two years, and, in the recent quarter, the extra cost of items in this group costing £1 in Brisbane was 1s. 11d. in Townsville, 1s. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in Warwick, and 1s. 2d. in Rockhampton. Electricity, gas, and firewood are important in this group.



Commonwealth and State Basic Wage Rates.

On 12th September, 1953, the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration decided that in the case of certain awards the automatic ("cost of living") adjustments should no longer operate. In a series of subsequent declarations of the Court, other awards have been varied in a similar manner. The basic wages which continue to operate under these varied awards are shown below.

State Industrial Courts in New South Wales, South Australia, and Western Australia have not made any basic wage adjustments since their declarations following the publication of index numbers for the June quarter of 1953. In Victoria, where wages are determined by Wages Boards, special legislation required the continuation of the automatic adjustment of wage rates in accordance with variations in retail price index numbers. Variations in the Melbourne index numbers since June quarter, 1953, have caused a net increase of 2s. in the basic rate for males. In Tasmania, where rates are also controlled by Wages Boards, an adjustment of 10s. which operated after the publication of the September quarter index numbers early in November was cancelled from 9th December, and the rates remain at their August 1953 level.

In Queensland, the State Industrial Court, after the publication of the September quarter index numbers, increased the basic wage by 3s. for males and 2s. for females, and, following the publication of the December quarter index numbers, a further increase of 3s. for males and 2s. for females was made. The State Court has been engaged in a general basic wage hearing, and to date no declaration has been made following the publication of the March quarter, 1954, index numbers.

Retail Prices and Basic Wage Rates.Australian Capital Cities.

Capital City.	Retail Price Index ("C" Series).			Commonwealth Basic Wage.			State Basic Wage.			
	June Qtr., 1953.	Dec. Qtr., 1953.	March Qtr., 1954.	Males. <sup>a</sup>			Males.	Females.	Date of Operation	
				£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	
Brisbane	2,115	2,176	2,187	10	18	0	11	5	0	7 11 0 1. 2. 54
Sydney	2,360	2,385	2,391	12	3	0	12	3	0	9 2 0 1. 8. 53
Melbourne	2,279	2,310	2,301	11	15	0	b	b		-
Adelaide	2,238	2,272	2,260	11	11	0	11	11	0	8 13 0 1. 8. 53
Perth	2,290	2,314	2,348	11	16	0	12	6	6	8 0 3 28. 7. 53
Hobart	2,351	2,485	2,437	12	2	0	b	b		-

a The female rates are 75 per cent. of the male rates.

b No State wage declared. The rate fixed by the Commonwealth Court has usually been followed to a large extent.

S. E. SOLOMON,  
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BRISBANE.

14th May, 1954.

Table No. 1 - The "C" Series Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1954.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1953.	June, 1953.	Sept., 1953.	Dec., 1953.	March, 1954.
Brisbane .. ..	863	1,079	2,155	2,105	2,115	2,143	2,176	2,187
Toowoomba .. ..	851	1,092	2,180	2,126	2,149	2,172	2,193	2,204
Rockhampton ..	861	1,084	2,187	2,139	2,146	2,177	2,202	2,221
Townsville .. ..	912	1,119	2,265	2,215	2,228	2,251	2,277	2,304
Bundaberg .. ..	841	1,059	2,131	2,104	2,109	2,121	2,137	2,158
Weighted Average								
Five Towns .. ..	864	1,082	2,166	2,116	2,127	2,154	2,184	2,197
Warwick .. .. .	822	1,073	2,156	2,114	2,130	2,147	2,168	2,180

Table No. 2 - Food and Groceries Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1954.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1953.	June, 1953.	Sept., 1953.	Dec., 1953.	March, 1954.
Brisbane .. ..	856	971	2,448	2,361	2,372	2,429	2,488	2,504
Toowoomba .. ..	814	1,010	2,480	2,396	2,426	2,481	2,496	2,516
Rockhampton ..	895	1,012	2,518	2,419	2,443	2,494	2,547	2,591
Townsville .. ..	955	1,057	2,635	2,553	2,568	2,609	2,660	2,703
Bundaberg .. ..	903	1,027	2,506	2,430	2,446	2,498	2,521	2,557
Weighted Average								
Five Towns .. ..	864	984	2,470	2,382	2,396	2,452	2,506	2,526
Warwick .. .. .	846	1,000	2,503	2,423	2,444	2,497	2,523	2,549

Table No. 3 - Clothing and Footwear Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1954.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1953.	June, 1953.	Sept., 1953.	Dec., 1953.	March, 1954.
Brisbane .. ..	829	1,454	3,112	3,083	3,104	3,116	3,110	3,117
Toowoomba .. ..	829	1,429	3,124	3,091	3,133	3,123	3,114	3,127
Rockhampton ..	845	1,477	3,099	3,114	3,100	3,115	3,089	3,092
Townsville .. ..	840	1,457	3,138	3,090	3,130	3,160	3,129	3,134
Bundaberg .. ..	839	1,447	3,115	3,149	3,154	3,121	3,092	3,094
Weighted Average								
Five Towns .. ..	831	1,454	3,114	3,088	3,109	3,119	3,110	3,116
Warwick .. .. .	825	1,441	3,099	3,101	3,113	3,098	3,090	3,095